UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

Student Composers' Concert #2

Tuesday, November 18th, 2025 at 7:30pm | Walter Hall, 80 Queen's Park

PROGRAM

Ave Maria

Benjamin Gabbay

Sasha Koukarina and Erica Harkey, *soprano*; Tamsin Spiller and Ivan Vutev, *alto*; Jean-Paul Feo, *tenor*; Rocco Marciano and Nathaniel Kulin, *bass*

New Frontiers

Matthew Woolard

Bevis Ng, *mallet percussion*

TRIO

Felix Hill

Eve Channell, *soprano*; Fabian Ramos, *clarinet*; Thomas Carli, *woodblock*

Erosion

Jeanne Tsui

Aimee Harness, *mezzo-soprano*; Adrian Tsui, *piano*

Two Breaths

Zane Shihadeh

Rocco Marciano, *piano*

Falling Star

Kaitlin White

Kaitlin White, *piano*

Intermission

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

As part of the Faculty's commitment to improving Indigenous inclusion, we call upon all members of our community to start/continue their personal journeys towards understanding and acknowledging Indigenous peoples' histories, truths and cultures.
Visit indigenous.utoronto.ca to learn more.

Theme & Variations

Sidney Forde

Simon Hauber, *violin*; Caleb Chiu, *violin*; Cameron Liao, *viola*; Ryan Wu, *cello*

FOMO

Audrey Sung

Aura Kwon, *violin*; Hoiyan Law, *cello;* Amy Lee, *piano*

Invictus

Daniel Wang Gomes

David Alejandro Zuniga Molina, *baritone*; Jingren Sun, *piano*

Prelude #2 for Violin and Piano

Hsiu-Ping Patrick Wu

Samuel Fong, *piano*; Sam Talebi, *violin*

Illusion

Kaveh Mirhosseini

Noa Sarid, *violin*

PROGRAM NOTES

Ave Maria

Setting any text to music may be seen as a way of magnifying and adding additional dimensions to its meaning; similarly, this setting of what may be the most widely known Catholic prayer of all time takes its musical cues from the dramatic concepts embodied in each phrase of the text—from awe of the Divine to the realization of mortality. It expands an ordinary recitation into an emotional journey.

The opening arpeggiating chord is the motif from which much of the piece's thematic material unfolds. Streams of overlapping voices, inspired by Renaissance polyphony, are continuously driven toward moments of reflective tranquility with a rhythmic elasticity reminiscent of plainchant.

New Frontiers

Imagine gazing up into the night sky on a tranquil spring evening and contemplating where we are in the universe. For the first movement, envision the mystical atmosphere of a planet almost totally void of life travelling through empty dark outer space with the occasional twinkling of distant stars and passing celestial objects. In the second movement, the planet suddenly has a spark of new microscopic life that bounces around, proliferates and quickly evolves to create a new emerging world.

TRIO

TRIO attempts to demonstrate the inherent conflicts and unlikely similarities between the timbres of the three unlikely instruments (voice, clarinet and woodblocks). What I tried to achieve in this work might have best been described by novelist Comte de Lautreamont as the beauty of "the fortuitous encounter upon an operating table of a sewing machine and an umbrella."

Erosion

It took the sea a thousand years, A thousand years to trace
The granite features of this cliff, In crag and scarp and base.
It took the sea an hour one night, An hour of storm to place
The sculpture of these granite seams Upon a woman's face.

While the sea requires a thousand years to erode stone, a single hour of storm is enough to reshape the human countenance. Throughout the piece, one can hear the erosion of the rocks as the tides rise and fall, sweeping over them. Yet, upon the sudden arrival of the storm, that erosion turns inward—the self becomes audible, fragilely swept by the unrelenting force of nature. The sea simply exists, indifferent and eternal, eroding all that stands before it.

Two Breaths

"Two Breaths" is a melancholic, slow-paced, piano piece using harmonies and melodies indicative of the Impressionistic Era. The piece's two themes are intended to represent the most human-like characteristic of all: the breath. At the time when Zane Shihadeh wrote this piece, he was extremely inspired by harmonic explorations by impressionistic composer, Claude Debussy, in piano pieces such as "Estampes" and "Berceuse héroïque." Shihadeh wished to hone his inspirations and display them by creating his new piece, "Two Breaths."

Falling Star

Falling Star was inspired by Witold Pruszkowski's (1846-1896) painting of the same name, completed in 1884. It aims to convey the beauty of the twinkling stars we see at night and embody what it might feel like to be one of them; an incredible beauty amongst so many others, but still yearn to stand out from the rest. As the music progresses and the tension and motion continuously grow, as if the star is becoming restless, trying to become something more while loosening itself from its place amongst the others before its spectacular, chaotic descent. At the end of the piece, the opening theme returns slightly modified and in a lower register as if to say that the fallen star has tragically wasted away, but the stars that surrounded it continue to shine.

Theme & Variations

Theme and Variations comprises a 22 bar original theme followed by five variations. Each variation alters rhythm, texture and or harmony while still deriving almost completely from transformations of the original thematic material.

FOMO

FOMO, is piano trio piece written to depict a type of social experience, known as Fear of Missing Out. There are a lot of imitations or delays which represent how people are catching up with trends and losing their own identity. The music slowly grows into a chaos-like conversation between the instruments. At the end, music starts falling apart, imitating how people collapse under the anxiety and stress of catching up.

Invictus

Invictus is an art song with text set by William Ernest Henley, a poet from the Victorian era. He wrote the titular poem after having undergone a series of leg surgeries, culminating in the amputation of his leg. This was a long and arduous procedure for his survival as he had suffered bone tuberculosis since childhood. Despite this, he was remembered as a stoic, resilient and optimistic person despite his condition. In Invictus, he affirms the strength of will and perseverance even in the face of seemingly insurmountable adversity. While adapting his work, I also took inspiration from Victorian art, such as the Nocturne in Gold and Black by James McNeill Whistler, the works by J. W. Turner, and paintings depicting the grunge and reality of street life. These conflicting images of romanticism and dark reality reflect the struggle I feel when I read the text written by Henley.

Prelude #2 for Violin and Piano

"Prelude No.2" is a piece that deals with grief, or the abstract of nothingness. In this piece, I am picturing an empty room growing more and more empty through the repetitive notes. While originally this was a solo piano work, I thought the violin could give the music more depth, engaging in a musical dialogue that captures the essence of mourning as a journey of both sorrow and healing.

Illusion

Illusion is a piece for violin solo and an ensemble of 58 violins, Qeychak, Tanburag, and voice (Master Khodadad Shakalzehi), adaptable to different performance settings. The work was inspired by one of my journeys to Balochistan in southeastern Iran, one of the most mysterious and remote regions in the world. The video you are watching is from my journey to Balochistan, through its isolated and untouched roads where I was completely alone. These mysterious landscapes became the true source of inspiration for the musical atmosphere of Illusion. For me, composing this work did not begin merely with musical notes, but with living through these profound and unique experiences. In some isolated villages, a ceremony known as Guati is performed, believed by locals to be a form of exorcism or an early form of music therapy. I drove over 2,300 kilometers alone to reach this region, and the musical and spiritual experience of witnessing this ritual became the source of inspiration for Illusion, composed on my journey back home. This music, following the local tradition, begins with slow, repetitive motifs that gradually increase in speed and intensity, creating a mysterious, trance-like atmosphere that draws the listener into a meditative and immersive state. The beach you see in the video is the Makoran coast a place full of secrets, whose atmosphere enchants anyone who encounters it. Illusion reflects the intersection of personal experience and cultural tradition, aiming to translate the unique musical essence of Balochistan into a contemporary work for violin and orchestra

BIOGRAPHIES

Composer and pianist **Benjamin Gabbay** holds both a Bachelor's and a Master's of Music in Composition from the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music, where he is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Musical Arts in Composition. He also holds an ARCT in piano performance from the Royal Conservatory of Music. Benjamin's compositions have received recognition by Toronto's St. James Cathedral (one of two winners, 2018-2019 composition competition), the Ruth Watson Henderson Choral Competition (honourable mention, 2017), and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (featured in Explore the Score 2024). Through U of T, he has been the recipient of several scholarships and awards, including the Faculty of Music Graduating Award (2023), the Lothar Klein Memorial Fellowship (2020), and the Lobodowsky Choral Scholarship (2018). Since 2022, he has been an Associate Composer with Arcady, a contemporary music ensemble in Brantford, Ontario (www.arcady.ca), with whom he regularly presents premieres of works for choir and chamber ensemble. www.benjamingabbay.com

Matthew Woolard is currently enjoying his fourth year in the Bachelor of Music Program with a Major in Composition at the University of Toronto. His current Composition Instructor is Dr. Roger Bergs. He has also been instructed by Andrew Clark. Matthew's long term mentor is Professor Larysa Kuzmenko. In 2025, he was awarded the Gwendolen M. Grant Scholarship. In 2024, he was awarded the Jean A. Chalmers Scholarship and the Sotherton Wadhams In-Course Scholarship. In 2023, he was awarded the Arthur Plettner Scholarship and the Joseph Alfred Whealy In-Course Scholarship. Matthew completed his ARCT Diploma from the Royal Conservatory of Music in 2021, achieving First Class Honours with Distinction. His primary instrument is the piano, with his university instructor being Dr. Emily Chiang. He also plays the trumpet for his own enjoyment. Matthew's hometown is Burlington, Ontario.

Daniel Wang Gomes is a composer who found his passion for music through video games and other media. Having first discovered his love for editing, animation, poetry and video games, Daniel eventually found his love for music through making music videos and soundtracks. He aims to bring influences from multiple sources, whether that is through combining genres, writing programmatically, or by creating multimedia works. Daniel is currently studying composition with Christos Hatzis, and is set on completing his BMus this academic year. His music is influenced by postmodern eclecticism, and he combines his contemporary and classical influences with jazz, electronic dance music and pop. He has made music for video games, concert works and film, and is taking part in the student-led concert minMAX, where his piece for 10 musicians, Lost in the City will be performed.

Jeanne Tsui, born in Hong Kong, is currently pursuing a degree in composition at the University of Toronto under the guidance of Diana Soh. She began composing in high school and was a finalist in the Crossroads Composition Competition, organized by the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her work is driven by everyday observations and a fascination with sound as narrative—capturing the seemingly mundane and reimagining it through rhythm, timbre, and gesture. With a background in handbell ringing, she strives to bridge the gap between handbell music and contemporary composition. Most recently, her work was performed by the Marco Polo Orchestra in Italy as part of the Veneto Art and Music Summit.

Zane Shihadeh's compositional repertoire stretches from neoclassical music to modern jazz, to film composition. His award-winning works have helped him into studying with several renowned faculty from the University of Toronto including Tania Gill and Larysa Kuzmenko. Now in his 3rd year of undergraduate studies, Shihadeh is continuing to pursue and develop his compositional craft by exploring varying genres including impressionism, neoclassical, scores for film and theater productions, and modern jazz. After graduating from university, Shihadeh wishes to continue his compositional ambitions, specifically in the realm of storytelling.

Kaitlin White (b. 2003) is an Canadian-American composer, pianist and visual artist from Bay Roberts, Newfoundland and Labrador who explores the relationship between music and visual art. As a way of incorporating her two passions into her everyday life, White began researching the connection between visual art and music and aims to translate the visual works she loves to music through her compositions. White has been awarded the R.F. MacLeod Memorial Entrance Scholarship in Music (2021), Helen J. Marquis Bursary in Music (2021), won first place in the Gower Community Band's arrangement category (2024) and was the recipient of the Glory of Mozart Travel Scholarship (2025). As of 2024, she became a bespoken fellow, and received acceptance to the ICEBERG Institute's Festival for New Music where she received her American premiere with "The Fairy Dance," performed by Hub New Music. She completed her Bachelor's degree (Honours) from Memorial University of Newfoundland's (MUN) School of Music in 2025 and is currently completing her Master's degree in Composition at the University of Toronto. When she is not writing music or playing piano, White is either reading, drawing or painting.

Sidney Forde is a second year composition student from Barbados. He is currently studying with Professor Larysa Kuzmenko. His music mainly takes influence from Prokofiev, Bartok and Brahms. His primary instrument is piano which he studies with Dr Younggun Kim.

Hoi Ching (Audrey) Sung is in the second year of a BMus in Interdisciplinary Music Studies with a minor in Composition, studying with James Lowrie. Her music has been played by the Unionville High School Orchestra. In 2025, Audrey was awarded both the Arthur Plettner Scholarship and the Richard lorweth Thurman Jazz Scholarship. As a violinist, Audrey has played with the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra, University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra and the Cathedral Bluff Symphony Orchestra.

Felix Hill is a Toronto based composer in his 3rd year of the U of T undergraduate composition program. He is interested in exploring interdisciplinary artistic relationships and experiments in timbre.

Taiwanese-Canadian composer, violinist, and multimedia artist **Hsiu-Ping Patrick Wu** blends his multicultural heritage into music spanning neo-romanticism to avant-garde. He has collaborated with renowned ensembles like the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and premiered works at major festivals worldwide. An accomplished violinist and Associate Composer of the Canadian Music Centre, Patrick is pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts at the University of Toronto and holds degrees in composition and violin performance. https://www.patrickwumusic.com/

Kaveh Mirhosseini, a doctoral student at the University of Toronto, is an Iranian composer, conductor, percussionist, and researcher of Iranian folk music. He founded the Tehran Cantus Ensemble, performing over 30 works by Iranian composers, and established MECA (Middle Eastern Composers Association) to promote Middle Eastern music globally. Mirhosseini performed as principal percussionist with the Tehran Symphony Orchestra for fourteen years and has guest-conducted the TSO and Iran National Symphony Orchestra. His compositions have been performed internationally by orchestras, ensembles, and soloists, including the Mili Reasurans Chamber Orchestra (Turkey), Koda Orchestra (Turkey), and the Respina String Quartet (Iran). He has released four albums: Illusion, Illumination, The Waste Land, and Mysticism. In Canada, he has curated Iranian contemporary music programs, conducted the JAM Orchestra in Toronto, and been a speaker at the UTNMF Iranian Contemporary Music Symposium. His works have received international recognition, including commissions from Christos Hatzis, Reza Vali, and others, and his Cello Concerto Illumination won the BARBOD Award in 2021.